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Swinburne and Cowardice:

Running away and *Poems and Ballads* (1866)

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Abstract

This essay considers the distinctive place in Swinburne’s writing, and in his relationship with audiences, of ideas of bravery and cowardice. Although the essay reaches *Poems and Ballads* (1866) only at the end, its central point is to identify 1866 as a prominent manifestation of a life-long commitment, despite the consequences, to a kind of ‘muscular literariness’. Swinburne wrote about bravery but he was also interested in constructing occasions when he could show that, in words, he himself was brave. In the penultimate decade of the nineteenth century, this inclination even involved tempting legal action against him, with which more vaguely he had been threatened in 1866. Understanding Swinburne’s despising of cowardice, I claim, provides a fresh perspective on this controversial poet’s relationship with controversy and reveals in part what was at stake behind his vigorous refusal not to alter a word of his most provocative volume—and then to move beyond it.

There are various unlikely tales about Algernon Charles Swinburne. One of them is his own—or at least, it might be his own. Mrs Disney Leith (Mary Gordon) was Swinburne’s cousin and he might once have thought that they had a future together. But she married another man and only

came back into Swinburne's life as a widow. In her *The Childhood of Algernon Charles Swinburne* (1917), Mrs Leith reprints what she claims is a letter from him (undated), in which Swinburne spoke of himself in the third person. 'After leaving Eton', he says,

near the end of his seventeenth year he wanted to go into the army. Didn't he, poor chap! The Balaklava [*sic*] Charge eclipsed all other visions. To be prepared for such a chance as that, instead of being prepared for Oxford, was the one dream of his life.¹

Conscious of the fact that he was 'little, slightly built', the young Algernon was not sure that his father would approve of this ambition. And his father, a successful sailor who served in the Royal Navy between 1810 and 1836 and ended his career a Rear Admiral, did not. So, by way of compensation, the disappointed Swinburne climbed, he said, the whole of Culver Cliff, on the Isle of Wight, as 'a chance of testing my nerve in face of death which could not be surpassed'.² The Cliff is 341 feet high. Although Culver is not vertical, it is a steep chalk-cliff climb and it seems inconceivably dangerous for a small, physically tremulous, sixteen-year-old boy who was always thought more to glide than to walk, unroped, and assisted by no climbing equipment. His mother, Swinburne's letter recalled, wanted, when her son had returned triumphantly home, 'to know why I had done such a thing':

and when I told her she laughed a short sweet laugh most satisfactory to the young ear, and said 'Nobody ever thought you were a coward, my boy.' I said that was all very well: but how could I tell till I tried? 'But you won't do it again?' she said. I replied, of course not[.]³

My aim in this essay is to argue that, figuratively speaking, Swinburne did not keep his word.

Whether or not the climbing story is true, it reveals elements of Swinburne's life that certainly are: his admiration for the brave and heroic (in both men and women) and his dislike of cowards. And however much this absorption might be 'explained' by Swinburne's acknowledgement of himself as little and slightly built, courage mattered for his idea of authorship as it mattered as a topic for poems. He wrote poetry about bravery and, more interestingly, was brave about poetry. Across Swinburne's life and in different ways, it pays to take his dislike of cowardice seriously. What is revealed is a fresh coherence to his poetic role models; a deeply located motivation for his support for violent political movements in the service of worthy ends (usually republican states in relation to Giuseppe Mazzini's conception of nationhood⁴); an aspect of the greater consistency in his later political poetry than is usually admitted; and the psychological coherence and necessity of his defiant habit across his career of reprinting controversial poems, even ones that damaged his reputation or in theory, and perhaps in practice, endangered his freedom. What is also revealed is his habit of rhetorically narrating his authorship in terms of conflicts and his periodic construction *of* conflict, his habit of manufacturing, even at the simple level of discourse, danger around him. Such habits, finally, throw new light on Swinburne's celebrated defence of *Poems and Ballads* (1866) for here was not primarily, in terms of psychological impulse, a liberal poet defending the principles of liberalism. Here was a besieged but self-declared courageous poet declining to desert his post (or rather *saying* he would not desert it).

Swinburne, who declared he climbed Culver Cliff because 'nobody' thought it could be done, liked valiant poets.⁵ William Blake, he observed in 1868, was one: "'Few,'" [Blake's] biographer has well said,' Swinburne wrote, "'are so persistently brave.'" But his was the supreme valour which ignorantly assumes and accepts itself.⁶ Blake's boldness was exceeded by that of Walter Savage Landor (1775-1864) before whom Swinburne had once knelt in devotion in Florence and to whom he dedicated *Atalanta in Calydon* (1865), itself a poem about bravery before overwhelming odds. Landor, for Swinburne in 1882, shared a heroic bond with John Milton,

scourge of monarchs, too. Milton 'had the same constancy to the same principles,' Swinburne declared in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*:

the same devotion to the same ideal of civic and heroic life; the same love, the same loyalty, the same wrath, scorn, and hatred, for the same several objects respectively; the same faith in the example and kinship to the spirit of the republican Romans, the same natural enjoyment and mastery of their tongue. Not accident merely but attraction must in any case have drawn them to enlist in the ranks and serve under the standard of the ancient Latin army of patriots and poets.⁷

The language was martial: Milton and Landor were soldier-poets, serving beneath a flag as loyalists, defending the values to which they were faithful. Sappho, in 'Anactoria' from *Poems and Ballads* (1866), has something of this too, for courage was not confined in Swinburne's mind to one sex. 'Of me the high God hath not all his will',⁸ Swinburne's Sappho says, with a bracing defiance not altogether unlike that of the daring soldier. Swinburne did not omit to point out in his article that Landor, unlike Sappho, really had been a soldier. In 1808, Swinburne noted, Landor 'left England for Spain as a volunteer to serve in the national army against Napoleon at the head of a regiment raised and supported at his sole expense'.⁹ In his admiration for this 'impulse not less heroic than that which was afterwards to lead Byron to a glorious death in redemption of Greece',¹⁰ Swinburne wisely omitted the fact that Landor had been involved in no actual fighting.

Sir Richard Burton (1821-90)—explorer, linguist, scholar, poet, Swinburne's friend from 1869—had been a soldier too. A Captain, he served as chief of staff to the maverick General W.F. Beatson in Constantinople during the Crimean War. And his robust life of adventure—disguised as an Indian *Haji*, Burton had, at exceptional risk, visited the forbidden cities of Mecca

and Medina in 1853¹¹—was in turn hailed in Swinburne's exquisite 'Elegy' for his defiant life.

The poem was first published in *The Fortnightly Review* for July 1892:

[...] For the world whose wildest ways he trod,
 And smiled their dangers down that coiled and curled
 Against him, knows him now less man than god.¹²

Smiling dangers down was not figurative. Burton had imperilled his life in Mecca and Medina—he had said, rather in the spirit of Swinburne at Culver Cliff, that he had wanted to 'prove, by trial, that what might be perilous to other travellers was safe to me'.¹³ And had also been the first European, it is said, to enter, in January 1855, the walled Ethiopian city of Harar. To do so was to face a continual menace of death, amputation, or life-long incarceration in the Amir's state dungeon where any captive, Burton remembered, 'is heavily ironed, lies in a filthy dungeon, and receives no food but what he can obtain from his own family'.¹⁴ Here was a writer who was also a man of action and he appeared authentically fearless. It was impossible for Swinburne not to find this engaging. 'Burton', he said at the end of the elegy with a tattoo of monosyllables: '—a name that lives till fame be dead'.¹⁵

The unjust fate of one brave man bothered Swinburne throughout his life. The story of the poet's long falling-out with Gladstonian Liberalism is too capacious to be told here in detail. But if it were Gladstone's support of Home Rule that had been the first major crisis in Swinburne's relationship with a party from which he had hoped too much,¹⁶ it was also Gladstone's failure to relieve General Charles George Gordon, killed at Khartoum on 26 January 1885, which helped break Swinburne's faith. As for many a British citizen, Gordon was a popular hero for the poet. And it was essential to him that the Prime Minister should seek to relieve Gordon, a soldier of the state besieged by the Mahdi. General Gordon had been a friend of Burton's ('an old friend and fellow soldier of his',¹⁷ Swinburne told his mother earnestly). But Gladstone was, Swinburne

informed Tola Dorian on 9 February 1888, a traitor to him: ‘l’homme qui laissa périr—disons mieux, qui fit périr Charles Gordon’.¹⁸ He never forgot this change from the G.O.M. (Grand Old Man) to the M.O.G. (Murderer of Gordon). ‘Beyond that crowning and towering climax of mendacity [of Gordon’s abandonment] it would be impossible for even a Gladstonite to go’, Swinburne wrote angrily to a newspaper on 29 March 1888 in a letter that was, fortunately for him, not published.¹⁹ The death at Khartoum—what Earl Cadogan, Viscount Chelsea, called ‘the terrible fate that has befallen that hero of heroes’—only revealed, Cadogan told the House of Lords on 27 February 1885, a government ‘hindered by a dread of their responsibility, which to them appears a perpetual bugbear; and [...] fettered, above all things, by the necessity of keeping together and consolidating that heterogeneous conglomeration of atoms which goes by the name of the Liberal Party’.²⁰ These could almost have been Swinburne’s words, dismayed by what seemed to him the treachery of Gladstone, the spinelessness of the Liberals, and the betrayal of a hero of heroes in service of his country.

Swinburne’s earliest political poems had been more generally in salute of brave deeds: ones undertaken by those that did not have a government that would betray them because they did not have a government. The political writing from 1867 onwards had been primarily about the Risorgimento and the bloody struggle to liberate Italy from Austrian occupation and Papal power, backed by Napoleon III’s France (it was a strangely belated interest, for the struggle was almost over). Swinburne’s *A Song of Italy* (1867), *Songs Before Sunrise* (1871), and *Songs of Two Nations* (1875), which included a reprint of *A Song of Italy*, expressed his republican faith. They articulated, too, his hatred of Napoleon III, his adoration of Giuseppe Mazzini as the intellectual leader of the republican side of the Risorgimento, and his certainty that heroic sacrifices—like that of Byron—were the foundation of fame. ‘O hero, O our help, O head sublime’, he said of the French revolutionary Armand Barbès in *Songs Before Sunrise*, ‘Thy day shall be commensurate with time’.²¹ A prophet of revolution, a man who steadfastly opposed the Second Empire and suffered in prison for it, Barbès was naturally one of Swinburne’s admired revolutionaries, ready

to suffer for his beliefs like Mazzini himself, the assassin Felice Orsini, the lawyer Carlo Poerio, the revolutionary Karl Blind, the exile Victor Hugo. Blood is everywhere in *Songs Before Sunrise*: the word appears fifty-eight times. Considering France in 'Quia Multum Amavit' as the cradle of revolution but now martyred by a tyrant and acting in Italy in support of an occupier, Swinburne breathlessly conceived a heroic war. 'Ah the hearts of heroes pierced,' he said:

the bright lips whitened
 Of strong men in their strength!
 Ah the banner-poles, the stretch of straightening streamers
 Straining their full reach out!
 Ah the men's hands making true the dreams of dreamers,
 The hopes brought forth in doubt!
 Ah the noise of horse, the charge and thunder of drumming,
 And swaying and sweep of swords!
 Ah the light that led them through of the world's life coming,
 Clear of its lies and lords!²²

Thinking about such language, the terms of heroism, clarifies the emotional forces, the attractions, which find expression in Swinburne's political poems. And it clarifies what Swinburne meant by patriotism. Such things matter for how his later political poetry has been conceived. Patriotism is noble, as Swinburne sees it: the decent service to a nation worthy of the name. That service is always to be celebrated; its costs of pain and bloodshed disguised; its slain heroes remembered perpetually in compensation for their bloody ends. Of course, the cause was important. Swinburne's politics were strikingly dependent on Mazzini and his conception of what was and what not a nation (Italy was a nation and therefore should be a nation-state; Ireland was not, and therefore must remain in the Union). But if Swinburne respected the

republican cause in the campaign for Italian reunification, it is also true that he admired bravery in the field just as he admired Sappho's bravery against the high God. The reunification of Italy was all the more attractive because it had to be fought for.

In later life, Swinburne continued to applaud those who struggled valiantly and the combination of principle with heroic action—by land or sea, by sword or gunpowder—remained unusually compelling. It is important to remember this not least because we have often been told that Swinburne's politics changed towards the end of his life. '[Swinburne] was never stupid exactly', said George Bernard Shaw, grandly,

but he often produced an impression of disloyalty by the transition from the splendour and vigour of his echoes of revolutionary writers to the conventionality of his own views, which were made in Putney. It is quite staggering to pass from his inspired exposition of Blake's meaning to his suburban disapprobation of it.²³

The 'conservatism' of Putney has become a commonplace. The 'most cosmopolitan of English poets was transformed into the most parochial and chauvinistic of British jingoes', said Cecil Y. Lang introducing the *Swinburne Letters*.²⁴ And it has been hard to move beyond that. Rikky Rooksby remarks that one of Swinburne's themes as an older man was 'queen and country'²⁵ and this is of a piece with the continuing sense that Swinburne had become a reactionary, writing, as Charlotte Ribeyrol put it in 2010, 'more conservative poems from the late 1870s onwards'.²⁶ I have elsewhere argued for the broad consistency of Swinburne's political views despite these appearances.²⁷ But here I want to turn briefly to the cluster of 'British heroes' poems that Swinburne wrote in the last decades of his life because they might easily seem evidence of 'conservatism'.

Here was poetry that celebrates national victories or great patriots: 'The Centenary of the Battle of the Nile', 'Trafalgar Day', 'Cromwell's Statue', 'A Word for the Navy', 'The First of

June', all included in *A Channel Passage and Other Poems* (1904). Yet Swinburne's sense of 'patriotism' had not fundamentally changed, even though he was writing about British achievements instead, for instance, of Italy's courage in throwing out her occupiers. He celebrates allied victories over Napoleon Bonaparte, hated as a tyrant as much by Landor as himself; he cheers Great Britain's republican leader (and swipes at the remaining portion of the Liberals who had decided against the idea of a statue to Cromwell outside the Palace of Westminster); and he delights in the end of the Second Boer War, a conflict that was peculiarly difficult for him (as a conflict *against* republicans) but which in essence he saw as a campaign for freedom against Boer cruelty and tyranny. There is general intellectual consistency with earlier attitudes. But if there is broad uniformity in intellectual impulse there is also general steadiness in Swinburne's concern with bravery as a peculiar index of value. His heroes are not, here or elsewhere, thinkers or unacknowledged legislators: they are conspicuous individuals who led campaigns in the full face of hostile volleys. 'Earth has known | No lordlier presence', he said of the 'warrior'²⁸ Oliver Cromwell, 'our man of men'.²⁹ 'There is none like him', Swinburne added of Nelson in 'Trafalgar Day':

and there shall be none.

When England bears again as great a son,

He can but follow fame where Nelson led.

There is not and there cannot be but one.³⁰

Swinburne knew Burton who had known Gordon; Swinburne's father, the poet claimed, had served 'as a midshipman under Lord Collingwood'³¹ who had fought with Nelson. That, as it happens, was not true, though Swinburne clearly believed it and told the story to Thomas Hardy.³² But the magnetism of a commander who had given his life in a conflict against a tyrant was unmodified since the time that Swinburne had read of the Battle of Balaclava.

It would be easy to think that this fascination in soldiery was both Swinburne's indirect compensation for that unlikely dream of joining the cavalry and an imaginative recompense for life as a lyric poet, living it might be thought in the Palace of Art about which Tennyson so memorably worried. The language of heroes undid, perhaps, the lingering cultural association between verse and fey indulgence, between aesthetic vocabulary and action in the world. We have now full knowledge, partly thanks to Catherine Maxwell's work, of the feminine impulses of Swinburne's writing. But there is also this other, gritty, out-door heroic side too. Political writing was his version of such heroism, a conception of the place of poetry in modern culture that was, say, different from that of William Morris, who had a notion of poetry's action in the world as intellectually and emotionally energising rather than as a figurative form of sword and shot. The closer, though not exact, model was Hugo. When Swinburne wrote of Hugo's poems on the Franco-Prussian War, *L'Année terrible* (1872) and its 'heroic utterance of the greatest Frenchman's trust in the country and the city of the Revolution',³³ he (Swinburne) was attributing a moral authority that exceeded even that of Shelley, 'our supreme poet',³⁴ or Landor, enlisted 'in the ranks and serv[ing] under the standard of the ancient Latin army of patriots and poets'. There is nothing faltering, under the Frenchman's shadow, about Swinburne's Hugo-like declarations: his view of the literary market-place was as a metaphorical space for courageous defiance. There is little hesitant about his damnation, for example, of Thomas Carlyle's support for the Tsar in *Note of an English Republican on the Muscovite Crusade* (1876)—prose, it is true, rather than poetry—or in his blasts against the supposedly recreant Gladstone or the allegedly perfidious Charles Stewart Parnell. Swinburne more directly fused writing with war in telling Mazzini, as he dedicated *Songs Before Sunrise* to him, that 'I bring you the sword of a song'. Certainly, the poetry was, Swinburne said with dutiful modesty, more 'Feeble' than Mazzini's real sword, yet at least the volume, when laid at the hero Mazzini's feet, 'will take fire'.³⁵ Only a fear of gauche over-confidence, it seems, could mute Swinburne's general conviction that poetry was some kind of weapon.

Swinburne put armour on verse. He liked to think of his work as a species of bravery. And he liked it even more when there was a fight *about* it. As Swinburne wrote of gallant individuals facing danger, he sometimes manufactured, or chose, circumstances where he could demonstrate his ability to stand conflict. He narrates disagreement. But at times he creates it. He is a poet who takes risks and who manufactures them, as if a kind of *provocateur*. And recurrently, he narrates his decisions as adversarial, as against objections, so that the reader is invited to see him, so to speak, armed in the field. The vocabulary of challenge is part of his way of understanding how publishing, criticism, and reading works. There is a particularly provocative example of chosen jeopardy in the case of Swinburne and Russia in the penultimate decade of the nineteenth century. This is a time when, publicly approving of violence against the Romanovs, Swinburne theoretically could have interested the law. In the background to the poetic events of willed hazard, for lack of a better term, there was Swinburne's general fury against Russia: the anger of the *Note* to Carlyle, the two sonnets of 'The White Czar' of February 1878, and the poem 'On the Russian Persecution of the Jews' published in *The Daily Telegraph* of 25 January 1882. But there were also poems that were more explicitly on the side of what, to the establishment in both Russia and Great Britain, was terrorism. The exact timing of Swinburne's 'The Launch of the *Livadia*' (1880), the first of these poems, is important.

In *The Times* on 28 September 1880, an 'Alleged Nihilist Plot' had been announced. It was, to be sure, one of many in the turbulent and violent history of mid to late nineteenth-century Russia. The report came directly from Fairfield, the Clyde shipyard at Govan, near Glasgow, where Scottish workers were busy building the *Livadia*, a new (and, as it turned out, hopelessly designed) yacht for Tsar Alexander II. Apparently, three Russian revolutionaries 'left London some days ago for Glasgow', said *The Times*, 'with two nitro-glycerine clocks to be concealed on board the yacht *Livadia* [...] and were to be timed to explode when the yacht had put to sea'.³⁶ The report came in the same month as rumours of another assassination plot had emerged from St Petersburg involving a bomb under a railway line over which the Tsar was to travel and in a

year when, in February, Russian revolutionaries really had succeeded in blowing up the dining room of the Winter Palace at St Petersburg hoping to kill Alexander.³⁷ The Tsar was late for dinner and escaped.

The ticking clock-bomb story was everywhere on 28 September: *The Times*, *The Birmingham Daily Post*, *The Aberdeen Weekly Journal*, *The Standard*, *The Daily News*, *The Dundee Courier & Argus* and *Northern Warder*, *The Leeds Mercury*. And two days later, on 30 September, Swinburne, ceaseless and noisy antagonist of the Romanovs, admirer of risk, dated his poem on the 'Launch of the Livadia':

[...] All curses be about her, and all ill

Go with her; heaven be dark above her way,

The gulf beneath her glad and sure of prey [...]³⁸

At the end of September 1880, with the news of bombs on board the ship circulating through the press, these words were close to public support for assassination. Swinburne's delight in daring men's actions (like smuggling explosive devices onto a ship) was transformed into a kind of verbal valour as he stood in danger of condemnation for incitement to murder. It had, for sure, been a *British* ship-yard that had built the luxury craft for the Tsar, and his family were linked to Queen Victoria: the Queen's godfather had, after all, been Emperor Alexander I. But Swinburne, rebellious over all such matters, hoped for an explosion and a destruction both of such national bonds and, more importantly, of the man whom he implacably saw as the Russian tyrant.

Swinburne must have been looking for a fight by publicly allying himself with would-be assassins of a head of state. Shortly after, in 'Russia: An Ode' (1890), he managed to provoke one. Or, at least, he managed to be discussed in the House of Commons as a proponent of homicide, liable to prosecution. Tsar Alexander II, whom Swinburne had wanted dead at sea,

really had been assassinated by members of Народная воля (Narodnaia volia—the ‘Peoples’ Will’) on 13 March 1881. The Tsar had been blown apart by a bomb on a St Petersburg street, dying in agony shortly afterwards. In ‘Russia: An Ode’, addressed to the assassinated Tsar’s son Alexander III and published in *The Fortnightly Review*, Swinburne hoped exactly same would happen again. ‘Bid the Second Alexander light the ‘Third’,³⁹ he declared, as if the two men were literally bombs to be detonated. Following Landor in praising the slaying of tyrants, Swinburne’s poem was as explicit as it became notorious:

Pity mad with passion, anguish mad with shame,
 Call aloud on justice by her darker name;
 Love grows hate for love’s sake; life takes death for guide.
 Night hath none but one red star—Tyrannicide.⁴⁰

These were less hesitant even than words from an actual Russian assassin exiled in London. ‘It is a dreadful thing to take in one’s own hands’, ‘Stepniak’, properly Sergey Mikhaylovich Stepnyak-Kravchinsky (1851-95), had said in *The Russian Storm-Cloud* (1886), ‘to decide the life or death of men whose guilt would be better judged by the country. But it is the greatest injustice to set against Russian patriots as an accusation what is their dire necessity.’⁴¹ Stepniak was the real thing. He had stabbed to death General Nikolai Mezentsov, the chief of the Secret Police, on the streets of St Petersburg on 4 August 1878. But he was not as outspoken—he thought of assassination as ‘dire’ even if it were a ‘necessity’—as Swinburne in his encouragement through poetry of the throwing of bombs.

It is worth remembering that (more or less) identical words had, a short time before, prompted a real criminal trial. Swinburne was in theory in danger of actual legal proceedings. The anarchist journalist Johann Most’s article on 19 March 1881 in the London-based German language journal he edited, *Freiheit*, was in vigorous praise of the assassins of Tsar Alexander II.

Most revealed a gory delight in the Tsar's painful death and gave open encouragement to others to deal with Alexander III in the same way that assassins had dealt with his father. It was a prose version of 'Russia: An Ode'. And the article made Most indictable on a charge of incitement to murder under the Offences to the Person Act 1861, which, with some significant modifications, including over abortion, remains in effect today.⁴² 'If only a single crowned wretch were disposed of every month,' Most had said, in words that Swinburne would not have blushed to utter: 'in a short time it should afford no one gratification henceforward still to play the monarch.'⁴³ This was all enough to make Most criminally liable under the 1861 statute. The jury took merely twenty-four minutes to convict him. It is true that the trial was not widely approved of, though it was warmly supported by the government in the Commons.⁴⁴ But it was a trial nevertheless. Swinburne's 'Russia: An Ode' was published at the end of the same decade. Case law already demonstrated the risk he, and perhaps the editors of *The Fortnightly*, were taking. Yet still he took that risk.

Swinburne's 'Ode' faced another hazard. It was published in the middle of a controversy that made written incitements to murder even more visible and liable to prosecution. The Parnell Commission, responding to the forged Pigott letters after the Phoenix Park Murders on 6 May 1882, involved a forensic investigation into Irish nationalism's alleged relationship with crime, including explicit incitements to murder in meetings, press statements, and letters. This investigation, which was peculiarly divisive for the Irish parliamentary party, was the determining context for Patrick O'Brien (c.1847-1917), MP for Monaghan North, and his views of Algernon Charles Swinburne. O'Brien, vexed by what the poet appeared to be getting away with, drew Parliament's attention to the 'Ode' in the light of the Commission and perhaps—it is at least theoretically possible—with a misty recollection of the *Freiheit* prosecutions. Irritated by a double standard of the treatment of Englishmen and Irishmen, O'Brien asked the Commons on 5 August 1890, as he started his campaign against Swinburne, whether the Prime Minister's attention

had been called to a poem by Mr Algernon Charles Swinburne in the current number of the *Fortnightly Review*, containing a direct incitement to the assassination of the Czar; whether any representation relative to this publication has been made to Her Majesty's Government by the Government of Russia, and whether Her Majesty's Government intend to prosecute Mr A.C. Swinburne or the publisher or printer of the *Fortnightly Review* for this gross incitement to assassination of the Sovereign of a friendly nation.⁴⁵

O'Brien had identified a tension in Westminster's attitude. The government was, as he said in the month to come in other Commons speeches and letters to the press,⁴⁶ unnaturally interested in what an Irishman might or might not have said about physical force solutions to the Act of Union. Yet the government was indifferent, it seemed, to an English poet's unambiguous support of what, to the establishment, ought to have been considered as terrorism. O'Brien might have made a stronger point had he adverted to the Offences to the Person Act 1861 and the *Freiheit* trials, and he was never given an exact legal argument why an opinion in a poem in 1890 was not indictable when exactly the same opinion in prose in 1881 was. The limits of the law here remained uncertain. Did Swinburne legally mean what he said or not? Tim Healy, the future Governor General of the Irish Free State, apparently dismissed the 'Ode' as a 'poet's licence'.⁴⁷ But Swinburne was deadly serious about being deadly. O'Brien's argument, made in the Palace of Westminster, might well have terrified an ordinary man. Calls for oneself to be prosecuted for a serious crime that are made from the floor of the House of Commons can hardly be easy to ignore. Yet Swinburne, so far as the evidence indicates, ignored them. It would be consistent with his attitudes elsewhere, indeed, if he had derived a distinctive form of satisfaction from this opportunity to test his courage. Here he had chosen to place himself close to the edge of legality and so could present his Landor-like loyalty, his unmoveable hatred of the Romanovs, against opposition, to prove again that he was not a coward. The poet made neither

retraction nor apology. He maintained the elevated indifference of certainty. And then he boldly reprinted the ‘Ode’ without a single word altered in *A Channel Passage* even though it is possible—Coulson Kernahan thought so—that the incident cost him an offer of the Poet Laureateship.⁴⁸ Swinburne would not desert his post.

Swinburne’s sense of what poetry could and should do was partly defined by reprinting defiantly. To do otherwise would, in the swirl of military terms in his mind, be the literary equivalent of that ‘nerveless cowardice’ he thought true of Branwell Brontë.⁴⁹ Swinburne did not alter his Second Boer War poems, either, though some of them caused a storm of protest too. This was the last major incident of his continued affirmation of the bond between words and swords, between writing and courage. Max Beerbohm, remembering Swinburne’s violent ‘The Transvaal’ (1899) at the commencement of the War, observed that the sonnet ‘embarrassed even [the Boers]’ angriest enemies’.⁵⁰ In his notorious poem in support of General Kitchener’s handling of the Boer citizens, ‘On the Death of Colonel Benson’ (published on 9 November 1901 in *The Saturday Review*), Swinburne received a letter from an army chaplain declaring he (Swinburne) as wrong to justify the British army’s scorched earth policy and the appalling nature of Kitchener’s concentration camps. The chaplain ‘[shuddered] at the awful thought suggested by your lines and must express to you my horror and regret that one whom I have respected as the friend of freedom should pen such awful words’.⁵¹ But Swinburne himself had permitted the publication of this letter. He had wanted the readers of *The Saturday Review* to see that he was being attacked. And so he could make it publicly clear again that he would not yield. Here was a new Burton who had chosen harm’s way and would continue unruffled. Permitting publication of the padre’s letter allowed Swinburne to publicize his own defence in terms of resistance to hostility (the Boers, Swinburne said in justification, wanted ‘to drive civilisation, liberty, and progress from South Africa’⁵² and so Kitchener’s methods were necessary). Whatever modern readers think of such a response—the poem on Benson is remembered with dismay in James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922)⁵³—it is apparent that Swinburne was not merely unmoved by protests but

motivated by them. He needed to make them visible. And afterwards, as was his custom, he published the Boer War poems in *A Channel Passage* without change, confirming even in this last volume that no one had made him afraid.

Even with more uncontroversial writing, Swinburne was apt to describe his own publishing and republishing decisions as if he were resisting a threat. He was ready, for instance, to represent literary judgment as a scene of strife, a kind of battle. Consider, for instance, his words of dedication to his reprinted articles and reviews published as *Essays and Studies* (1875). ‘To omit or to rewrite any part’, he said in introducing the volume,

would be to forfeit the one claim which I should care to put up on their behalf; that they give frank and full expression to what were, at the time of writing, my sincere and deliberate opinions. Only where I have detected a positive error or suspected a possible injustice have I changed or cancelled a syllable.⁵⁴

The fact that he was writing to his father, Admiral Swinburne, might have intensified the poet’s desire to narrate decisions as acts of vaguely military loyalty. Nevertheless, the poet encourages the reader to think that, even in this modest context, he is answering a challenger, responding to someone who has thrown down a gage. And Swinburne makes another, later, Preface a scene in which he can emerge as a writer-warrior resisting attack. ‘For the miscellaneous character of such a collection’, he said in the Preface to *Miscellanies* (1886):

the title selected as the only one appropriate must be taken as conveying whatever may be thought requisite of apology or excuse. For the opinions or the expressions of opinion thus re-published on literary or other matters I have no such plea to offer in arrest of judgment from any quarter. I have had the honour to be assailed with some vehemence for

the disrespect shown in my occasional reference to writers whose ability no rational man could be supposed capable of denying.⁵⁵

Polite but waspish, Swinburne places himself in the middle of another conflict—real, exaggerated, or invented, the original reader could not tell—from the first page of the book. Opinions, again, are apparently under fire, and Swinburne wants to let us know that. He can then let us know that they will not be changed. Here is authorship as opposition—as something peculiarly gutsy.

I have broken chronological order in this discussion because chronology does not quite pertain to Swinburne as it does to other writers. Since he is so intellectually consistent (albeit with qualifications), Swinburne can be intriguingly out-of-time. Breaking chronology allows me to avoid talking about the ‘development’ of his attitudes to cowardice and to stress their largely inflexible nature. But there was, of course, a first instantiation chronologically speaking of Swinburne’s refusal to alter his words even at a personal cost. And it is the most well-known: the dispute over *Poems and Ballads* (1866) that might also have cost him the Laureateship.⁵⁶ There are two differences in this instance to my other examples, one of which is minor and the second of which is important. Swinburne, first, uses a more extended kind of gentlemanly disdain to meet his opponents as well as violent denunciation. Second, more consequentially, there is evidence, uniquely, to suggest that the poet regretted putting himself in danger in the first place and eventually tiptoed quietly away.

The story of Swinburne’s volume is too familiar to need much reiteration. The outline is this: despite advice from friends to tone down a small number of the poems, Swinburne, as far as we know, published *Poems and Ballads* as he had intended, without pruning. The volume initially appeared from Shelley’s old publisher, Edward Moxon. But a small number of high-profile criticisms in the press and rumours of legal action—presumably under blasphemy legislation rather than the new Obscene Publications Act 1857⁵⁷—made Moxon withdraw the volume.

After some re-negotiation by Swinburne and perhaps other intermediaries, it was issued again by John Camden Hotten. Before it was so issued, Swinburne was advised by friends again to make adjustments: a few lines, a few words. 'I hope [Swinburne] may be induced not to brave and defy that storm [of criticism],' said Lord Lytton on 20 August 1866, just after the Moxon volume had been withdrawn, 'but to purgate his volume of certain pruriences into which it amazes me any poet could fall.'⁵⁸ Yet Swinburne would do no such thing.

Indeed, what he did do was to issue a pamphlet that succeeded in making the conflict sound as bad as he could. And, fostering dispute in a new way, the poet raised the temperature further by speaking *de haut en bas*. Swinburne had received a number of sharp reviews, including from John Morley (though Morley later regretted what he had said). But a reader of *Notes on Poems and Reviews* (1866), the pamphlet in question, might be forgiven for thinking that much of the English press was against him. 'It is by no wish of my own that I accept the task now proposed to me', Swinburne began loftily:

To vindicate or defend myself from the assault or the charge of men whom but for their attacks I might never have heard of, is an office which I, or any writer who respects his work, cannot without reluctance stoop to undertake. As long as the attacks on my book—I have seen a few, I am told there are many—were confined within the usual limits of the anonymous press, I let them pass without the notice to which they appeared to aspire.⁵⁹

But the reviews had not all been anonymous and they had gone, so Swinburne wants us to know, to extremes:

Certain poems of mine, it appears, have been impugned by judges, with or without a name, as indecent or as blasphemous. To me, as I have intimated, their verdict is a matter of

infinite indifference [...] But, remembering that science must not scorn to investigate animalcules and infusoria, I am ready for once to play the anatomist.⁶⁰

Swinburne replies to extremes with extremes. His critics, he says, are the lowest form of life: bugs and germs. It is true that they have accused him of a theoretically indictable offence (Moxon really had been convicted under common law in 1841 of blasphemous libel with his publication of Shelley's *Queen Mab*). But Swinburne is steadfast; so steadfast in fact that his critic's 'verdict'—how provocative to use that legal word here—'is a matter of infinite indifference'. If we have become accustomed to regard Swinburne's defence of *Poems and Ballads* as the voice of rebellious liberalism against prudery, it is important to remember that it was a voice fired by controversy itself and keen, it appears, to promote the existence of that controversy in strong terms. Swinburne needed, here as later, to be in the midst of trouble. Courage was the air he had to breathe. And he would continue to put himself in scenes of trouble as much as he would continue to tell his readers that that is where he was.

Swinburne's 'defence', with its violent denunciations of those whose spit, he says, will be blown back in their faces,⁶¹ manages to create a scene of tumult in which the poet himself remains unflappable (even if his continued protestations also make one think that he *is* flapping). Hotten had hoped the poet would omit 'a very few lines'⁶² before he reissued the collection. Yet Swinburne insisted on retaining every word. Indeed, even as late as 1904, he was underlining the fact that he would not alter anything of either the poems or his subsequent defence of them: 'I need not remind you', he said to Watts-Dunton, characteristically phrasing himself as if surrounded by antagonists, 'that all I have to say about [*Poems and Ballads*] was said once for all in the year of its publication: I have nothing to add to my notes then taken, and I have nothing to retract from them.'⁶³ Resisting changing anything for Hotten, Swinburne's account in 1866 had been expressed in language that would become the familiar vocabulary of his struggles: any alteration, he said, would be akin to act of cowardice in the field. 'But *now* to alter my course or

mutilate my published work', Swinburne replied to Lytton's advice to 'purgate' his volume, 'seems to me somewhat like deserting one's colours'.⁶⁴ Editing is transformed into cowardice under fire. Keeping to one's original plans where *Poems and Ballads* is concerned is not, as Swinburne primarily experienced it, a posture taken in defence of aesthetic liberalism. His steadfastness is an act of upright martial commitment. But then, intriguingly, Swinburne added in his letter to Lytton: 'One may or may not repent having enlisted, but to lay down one's arms except under compulsion, remains intolerable'.⁶⁵ It is a revealing moment: for once in Swinburne's career as a soldier-poet there appears to be hesitation.⁶⁶

Half-way up Culver Cliff, Swinburne remembered: 'I felt like setting my teeth and swearing I would not come down again alive'.⁶⁷ That is the only trace in his letter of anything like uncertainty. But it is plainly not expressed as regret. The trace in the correspondence with Lytton is more distinct. 'One may or may not repent having enlisted' is not a wholly confident man's phrasing. Yet once having signed up, Swinburne will not abandon the standard—or at least, he will continue to *say* that he will not and had not, even in 1904. The 'market may have its martyrdoms as well as the pulpit', remarked John Ruskin in 1860, 'and trade its heroisms as well as war'.⁶⁸ Swinburne, a few years later, was determined to tell his readers that poetry could have its heroisms too.

Yet what Swinburne said about *Poems and Ballads* (1866) was different, in part, from what he did. Although he surrounded the publication and reception with feisty statements of his own determination, it is not hard to notice the fact that Swinburne published very little in the spirit of the 1866 volume thereafter. He issued, as this article has observed, provocative political verse and did not shy from continuing to offend or affront a portion of his readers with views on, say, Ireland, Gladstone, the Tsars, or the Boers. But he published nothing like 'Les Noyades' or 'Hermaphroditus' again; no poems involving extended consideration of necrophilia, lesbian sex, or the erotic satisfactions of torture. His next stage after *Poems and Ballads* (1866), indeed, was to plunge into that political poetry about the Risorgimento that was at once, we might say, a new

assertion of poetry-as-courage and a way of avoiding, or moving away from, the controversy over *Poems and Ballads*. By the time of his quasi-autobiographical poem, 'Thalassius' (1880), Swinburne was describing himself as a political poet through and through whose early writing had been a diversion, the following of death rather than life.

In turn, then, there is one further perspective on the history of *Poems and Ballads* (1866) to consider. Walter Savage Landor really did go to war, even if he did not actually fight. But did Swinburne really climb Culver Cliff? His absorption with writing as an act of bravery, and his tactical manufacture of risk or deliberate provocation of danger, are certain. These are important features of his distinctive conception of writing. But was the starting point, the desire to prove he was not a coward, a boast? *Barber's Picturesque Guide to the Isle of Wight* (1850) thought even the tiny path that ran from the top of the Cliff to the Hermit's Hole (a small cavern in the cliff about forty feet from the top) too dangerous to risk.⁶⁹ The Cliff *has* been climbed. The contemporary organisation 'UK Climbing' lists eighteen different routes up the face today.⁷⁰ But these are for serious climbers, with experience, safety equipment, climbing equipment, and training. Swinburne was not unaccustomed to making things up—like, perhaps, the fact his father served with Collingwood or more certainly the poetry in his supposed review of the collections called *Les Amours étiques* by 'Félicien Cossu' and *Les Abîmes* by 'Ernest Clouët', all of which was fabrication. Perhaps Swinburne was so determined to assert that he was not a coward that, to Mary Gordon, the woman who had apparently left him for another man (who was a soldier, as it happens), Swinburne invented an episode to clinch a psychological not a literal truth. I do not know. What is for certain is that the Culver Cliff incident began with admiration not simply for bravery but for failure.

Of all events to inspire a keenness to join the army, the Battle of Balaclava on 25 October 1854, with what the Victorians knew as the famously disastrous Charge of the Light Brigade, was among the least sensible. It is a remarkable act of provocation to narrate a desire for glory as commencing with what was understood at the time to have been the catastrophic result of a

blunder. Swinburne's starting point for a life-long embrace of courage was, oddly enough, a scene of heroism not only in the face of danger but of disaster. And this points to a further critical feature in all the language of desire I have been examining in this article. It was not merely courage that Swinburne admired. It was courage to the death. It was the courage of Byron, of Horatio Lord Nelson, Marino Faliero, Felice Orsini, the assassins of Alexander II, the Light Brigade.⁷¹ Wrapped up with his long admiration for heroism is veneration for sacrifice, like that of Chthonia in *Erechtheus* (1876), another woman hero. And this is the final twist in my history of his martial conception of authorship and his habit, rhetorically as well as literally speaking, of endangering himself. A tragic writer who was absorbed by fatalism—by unmerited death in *Atalanta* and *Erechtheus* that is simply and inexplicably decreed by the gods; by the calamity of Tristram and Yseult that occurs merely because they drink from the wrong cup—Swinburne was even more deadly in his understanding of what writing bravely meant. He could not be slain in battle. But Swinburne could entice peril in and by his writing as an imaginative substitute not only for outdoor bravery but for destruction, like the hacking to death of General Gordon, the hero of heroes.

What does this tell us about *Poems and Ballads* (1866)? What Swinburne lost through tempting fate was never his life nor, as it turned out, his freedom. Yet, all the same, Swinburne's valiant writing, his more or less fixed principles, his republishing, his denunciations of cowards, his controversies and his willed tempting of criminal liability, are strange and tense expressions of a yearning not only to be brave but to enter proximity with calamity.⁷² He is a poet absorbed by the slaying of others and, figuratively, it might be said, of himself. Both courage and the possibilities of being overwhelmed, of finding courage not enough, invigorate Swinburne's poetics of hazard as he places himself in nineteenth-century letters as simultaneously wanting to defy trouble and looking for it. Yet the exception is 1866 when what was at stake was not life but poetic life; not existence but a young man's future as a poet in print. Swinburne's silent (more or less) retreat from *Poems and Ballads* (1866) is evidenced by his more complete turn to politics

(there had been a few political poems in *Poems and Ballads*) and in the assurance of ‘Thalassius’ that politics and liberty were his real subjects anyway. But that retreat was finally confirmed, as it was consolidated, by the *Selections from the Poetical Works of Algernon Charles Swinburne* (1887), nominally edited by Watts. Here, in the only selected edition issued in Swinburne’s life-time in which he had a direct hand, we see just how far the poet was prepared to go to shift what his personal poetic history looked like and to back away, with Watts’ approval, from what had once been his post, however much he insisted in the 1904 Preface that he had nothing to add to what he had once said about 1866. There is only ‘Itylus’ from *Poems and Ballads* (1866) included in *Selections*—a remarkable act of self-refashioning. To whatever extent Swinburne was invigorated by the proximity of destruction, and oxygenated by valour on the edge, when it came to a really grave question about his reputation and poetic career—as well as about his legacy—he was, over his most controversial volume, capable of slipping from the field after all. In 1904, he maintained his courageous consistency simply by telling us otherwise.

NOTES

¹ *The Swinburne Letters*, ed. Cecil Y. Lang, 6 volumes (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959-62), vi.251. Hereafter *SL*.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, vi.253.

⁴ The significance of Mazzini’s Romantic conception of nationhood is explained in Francis O’Gorman, ‘Swinburne and Ireland’, *Review of English Studies*, 64 (2013), 654-74.

⁵ *SL*, vi.253.

⁶ Algernon Charles Swinburne, *William Blake: A Critical Essay* (London: Hotten, 1868), 65.

⁷ The article originally appeared in the ninth edition of *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, volume 14, 278-80 and was reprinted as ‘Landor’ in Algernon Charles Swinburne, *Miscellanies* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1886), 201-9 (201).

⁸ Algernon Charles Swinburne, *Poems and Ballads* (London: Hotten, 1866), 74.

⁹ Swinburne, *Miscellanies*, 202.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ See Sir Richard Burton, *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al-Madinah and Meccah*, ed. Isobel Burton, 2 vols (London: Tylston and Edwards, 1893).

¹² Algernon Charles Swinburne, 'Elegy, 1869-1891', *Astrophel and Other Poems* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1894), 127.

¹³ Burton, *Personal Narrative*, i.2.

¹⁴ Richard Burton, *First Footsteps in East Africa Or, An Exploration of Harar*, ed. Isobel Burton, 2 vols (London: Tylston and Edwards, 1894), ii.22.

¹⁵ Swinburne, 'Elegy, 1869-1891', 135.

¹⁶ See O'Gorman, 'Swinburne and Ireland'.

¹⁷ Letter of 12 August 1885, *SL*, v.121.

¹⁸ *SL*, v.225 ('the man who let perish—I had better say who *killed* Charles Gordon' [my translation]).

¹⁹ *SL*, v.229.

²⁰ Hansard Lords, Debate, 27 February 1885 vol. 294 c.1571.

²¹ 'Armand Barbès', Algernon Charles Swinburne, *Songs Before Sunrise* (London: Ellis, 1871), 131.

²² 'Quia Multum Amavit', *ibid.*, 134-5.

²³ *Ibid.*, 129.

²⁴ *SL*, i.xxviii. There is some effort to modify this view in Julia M. Saville's 'Swinburne *contra* Whitman: From Cosmopolitan Republican to Parochial English Jingo?', *ELH*, 78 (2011), 479-505 but the exact nature of Swinburne's political views is not established here.

²⁵ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, entry on Swinburne, electronic edition.

²⁶ Charlotte Ribeyrol, 'A Channel Passage: Swinburne and France' in Yisrael Levin, ed., *A.C. Swinburne and the Singing Word: New Perspectives on the Mature Work* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2010), 107-26 (107).

²⁷ See my 'Swinburne and Ireland' and the Introduction to Francis O'Gorman, ed., *Algernon Charles Swinburne: Twenty-first Century Oxford Authors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), xiv-xlvi.

²⁸ 'Cromwell's Statue', Algernon Charles Swinburne, *A Channel Passage and Other Poems* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1904), 93.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 94.

³⁰ 'Trafalgar Day', *A Channel Passage*, 90.

³¹ Letter of 15 July 1895, *SL*, vi.82.

³² See the letter of 23 January [1904] about Hardy's *The Dynasts*, *SL*, vi.175.

³³ 'Victor Hugo's *L'Année terrible*' [1872], in Algernon Charles Swinburne, *Essays and Studies* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1875), 49.

³⁴ *SL*, ii.82.

³⁵ 'Dedication: To Joseph Mazzini' in *Songs Before Sunrise*, vi.

³⁶ *The Times*, 9, was drawing information from *The Glasgow Herald*, 27 September 1880, 4. Nitro-glycerin had become commercially available in the 1860s, not least from Alfred Nobel's company in Germany, though it was at that point highly unstable.

³⁷ See, e.g., 'Another Attempt on the Life of the Czar', *The Dundee Courier & Argus*, 4 September 1880, 1.

³⁸ Algernon Charles Swinburne, *Studies in Song* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1880), 86.

³⁹ 'Russia: An Ode' in *A Channel Passage*, 134.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 133.

⁴¹ 'Stepniak', *The Russian Storm-Cloud; Or, Russia in her Relations to Neighbouring Countries* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1886), 44.

⁴² 24 & 25 Vict. c.100 s.4 ('whosoever shall solicit, encourage, persuade, or endeavour to persuade, or shall propose to any person, to murder any other person, whether he be a subject of Her Majesty or not, and whether he be within the Queen's dominions or not, shall be guilty of a misdemeanour', on www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Vict/24-25/100/section/4, last accessed 27 April 2017).

⁴³ Quoted in Bernard Porter, 'The *Freiheit* Prosecutions, 1881-1882', *The Historical Journal*, 23 (1980), 833-56 (834), from which details of this case are taken.

⁴⁴ See Hansard Commons, Debate 31 March 1881 vol. 260 cc.344-7.

⁴⁵ Hansard Commons, Debate 5 August 1890, vol. 347 c.1921.

⁴⁶ See, for instance, O'Brien's letter in *The Daily News*, 7 August 1890, 6; Hansard Commons, Debate 12 August 1890, vol. 348 cc.720-1; *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 9 August 1890, 6.

⁴⁷ As reported in *The Western Mail*, 13 August 1890, 5 though the line is not in Hansard.

⁴⁸ See Coulson Kernahan, *Swinburne as I Knew Him, With Some Unpublished Letters from the Poet to his Cousin the Hon. Lady Henniker Heaton* (London: Bodley Head, 1919), 55-6.

⁴⁹ 'Emily Brontë', *Miscellanies*, 260-70 (263).

⁵⁰ 'No.2. The Pines' (1914) in Max Beerbohm, *And Even Now* (London: Heinemann, 1920), 60.

⁵¹ 'Mr Swinburne on Boer Tyranny', *Saturday Review*, 92 (16 November 1901), 621-2 (621).

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ See James Joyce, *Ulysses: The Corrected Text*, Student Edition, ed. by Hans Walter Gabler with Wolfhard Steppe and Claus Melchior (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), 15:4601-4.

⁵⁴ 'Preface', *Essays and Studies*, vii.

⁵⁵ 'Preface', *Miscellanies*, v.

⁵⁶ The issue of Swinburne and the laureateship has been most recently discussed in Francis O'Gorman, 'Swinburne and Tennyson's Peerage', *English Studies*, 96 (2015), 277-92.

⁵⁷ 20 & 21 Vict. c.83.

⁵⁸ *SL*, i.174n.

⁵⁹ Algernon Charles Swinburne, *Notes on Poems and Reviews* (London: Hotten, 1866), 5.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁶¹ See *ibid.*, 5.

⁶² *Uncollected Letters of Algernon Charles Swinburne*, ed. Terry L. Myers, 3 vols (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2005), i.71-2, letter of 29 August 1866. Hereafter *UL*.

⁶³ 'Dedicatory Epistle', *The Poems of Algernon Charles Swinburne*, 6 vols (London: Chatto & Windus, 1904), i.vii.

⁶⁴ *SL*, i.173 (letter of 13 August 1866).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ I do not mean to imply that there are no occasions when Swinburne was ready to take editorial advice from those he trusted to prune controversial material. He was prepared to change *Notes on Poems and Reviews* to avoid more problems and prepared to take out anything disrespectful in the *Blake* volume (*UL*, i.29). John Morley persuaded him to reduce a potential 'scandal' in his 'Note on the Text of Shelley' (1869) (*UL*, i.154-5).

⁶⁷ *SL*, vi.252.

⁶⁸ *The Library Edition of the Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, 39 vols (London: Allen, 1903-12), xvii.39.

⁶⁹ *Barber's Picturesque Guide to the Isle of Wight* (London: Bohn, 1850), 30.

⁷⁰ See <www.ukclimbing.com>, last accessed 27 April 2017.

⁷¹ For more on Swinburne's poetics of violence, see Francis O'Gorman, 'Swinburne in Difficulty', *SEL: Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 57 (2017), 00-00.

⁷² I do not here include discussion of Swinburne's personal vexation about the possible publication of alleged details of his private life about which he wrote to Theodore Watts on 16 April 1876. Swinburne was defiant here too but my topic in the article is public writing more than private life. See *SL*, iii.176-80.